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Alone amidst X-men: Rogue, Sexuality, and Mental Illness

Fionnuala Doran

Rogue and the Diagnosis of Hysteria

Hysteria as a medical condition was first named and described by Hippocrates, the 4th-century physician and scholar from whose writings the modern conception of medicine is derived (King 3). Despite the length of time the term has been in the medical canon, defining the specific nature of the malady or the symptoms that characterise the condition remains difficult. What is consistent, however, is the rooting of hysteria in the female body, in female sexuality, and in the perceived abnormalities therein. Hysteria could be defined as “a picture of women in the words of men” that paints “... a caricature of femininity” (Chodoff and Lyons 739). Accordingly, hysteria is a mental illness diagnosis rooted in misogyny -- in misunderstandings that demonize the female body and mind (Showalter 286).

Hippocrates attributed the condition to a woman’s wandering womb, which, when not in its ‘proper’ use of childbearing, moved around a woman’s body causing illness (Faraone 4). In the introduction to *Hysteria beyond Freud*, Sander L. Gilman describes the Hippocratic epidemiology: “The childless woman, due to the lack of spaces in her body in which moisture can be stored, is at particular risk, above all if she abstains from the ‘moistening’ activity of sexual intercourse” (Gilman 18). As a medical diagnosis and a descriptor for what is described as exaggerated and uncontrollable emotional behavior, much of the discourse on and understandings of hysteria are rooted in Freudian psychoanalysis and theories of sexuality. Helen King proposes that contemporary definitions of hysteria are more an invention of the 19th century than of 400 BC (King 8). Elaine Showalter agrees, describing the diagnosis as “epidemic in the last decades of the (19th) century” (Showalter 304). In truth, this mental illness ‘epidemic’ reflected a deep-seated social anxiety about the role of women

as industrialisation offered them increasingly independent lives outside of marriage, the home, and motherhood. Sylvia Federici's *Witches, Witch-hunting and Women* similarly explores the ways in which witch trials were used in the newly mechanised world of the 17th century to mould "the new model of femininity..." as "sexless, obedient, submissive, resigned to subordination to the male world..." (Federici 32). On a similar note, Michel Foucault proposed hysteria as a masculine label for female sexual agency, created to control the inherent, inescapable sexuality of the female body through the structures of medical, patriarchal power (Showalter 303).

Both pre- and post-Freudian definitions of hysteria link together the female body, female sexuality, and poor (or dangerous) mental health, with each element problematising the other.¹ Freud traced hysteria in his female patients to the repression of memories, experiences, and sexual impulses. Of one woman, he admits, "I cannot help suspecting that this woman who was so passionate and so capable of strong feelings had not won her victory over her sexual needs without severe struggles, and that at times her attempts at suppressing this most powerful of all instincts had exposed her to severe mental exhaustion" (Breuer and Freud 103). In another patient, Freud linked her hysteric symptoms to "the horror by which a virginal mind is overcome when it is faced for the first time with the world of sexuality," awakened in her after witnessing her uncle committing adultery, an event the patient repressed (Breuer and Freud 127-128).² This reading partly aligns with late 19th- and early

¹ Freud did not view hysteria as a female-specific condition, although all the case histories detailed in *Studies on Hysteria* are of female patients.

² Repression, according to Freud, arises from the thrust of painful and conflicting conscious experience into the unconscious realm, where that experience "remain(s) active, determining behaviour and experience... producing neurotic symptoms of various kinds, as well as

20th-century diagnoses of hysteria that “saw (it) as a disorder of female adolescence” (Showalter 301). Accordingly, hysteria was the result of female ignorance of her own physiology and of social taboos that made it impossible for women to explore, learn about, and enjoy their own post-puberty bodies.

Under definitions such as these, a female character like Rogue, who cannot engage in heterosexual, procreative intercourse as she is unable to make skin-to-skin contact without causing harm to those she touches, is at high-risk of developing hysterical symptoms. For one, her inability to touch another person without harming them necessitates, in the Freudian model, the suppression of her sexual instincts. Puberty and the emergence of the powers that cut her off from physical contact thus render Rogue sexually passive.³ Rogue’s powers are a ‘barrier’ to a free physical and sexual exploration and experimentation with others. However, at the same time, Rogue is able to challenge her sexual passivity by refusing to use her powers responsibly.

Writer Chris Claremont and artist Michael Golden created Rogue in 1981 as an antagonist for the then Ms Marvel, Carol Danvers. Attacking Danvers on the Golden Gate bridge in San Francisco, Rogue used her mutant powers to absorb her opponent’s thoughts, memories, and superpowers through touch. Rogue originally acted as a plot device for Carol Danvers’ development, rather than as an agent in her own right partly to reintroduce Danvers after a period of absence and partly to remind readers of the agency that had been stripped from Danvers in her last Avengers storyline, in which she had been kidnapped and raped by a

determining dreams... and underlying many types of deviations from normal behaviour” (Drever and Wallerstein 247).

³ In the X-men universe, puberty is also the physiological period of change and sexual awakening that triggers the emergence of mutant powers.

would-be suitor (Strickland). In contrast to the passivity this position as a plot-device entails, Rogue's debut appearance depicted a brash, cocksure young woman with a Grace Jones-inspired haircut (Threadgill) punching her way through the Avengers with Ms Marvel's acquired super-strength and flight. Ostensibly a villain, Rogue joined the roster of Uncanny X-men soon afterwards and rose to become one of the most popular and enduring female characters in the X-franchise.

A child runaway, Rogue was fostered by villains Mystique and Destiny from a young age, before her mutant powers were apparent. As a teen, she was recruited into her mothers' terrorist group, the Brotherhood of Mutants, to plot an attack against the Avengers. Wracked by the after effects of absorbing the entirety of Carol Danvers' psyche and powers during that attack, Rogue left the Brotherhood to seek help from Professor Charles Xavier in both controlling her mutant powers and preventing Danver's psyche from overwhelming her own. She has been a constant X-men team member since joining and, in the past decade, has also joined her one-time foes, The Avengers, as a team member.

Control and specifically the control of female sexuality is at the center of her character. Without proper precautions, Rogue threatens to literally steal the self or essence (memories, emotions, abilities) of anyone in her vicinity. In this sense, any physical or sexual expression by her is inherently diabolical and irrational, made more so by the lack of agency she has to stop herself from touching others. Rogue's search for control over her own sexuality and bodily autonomy and, by extension, her mutant powers has often been framed around passive acquiesce to structures of patriarchal care (such as in the runs of Joe Kelly, Steve Seagle, and Mike Carey) in which she seeks or receives a surgical removal. Such procedures, however, align with those of the witch trials of post-medieval Europe that were "a form of exorcism" against the potent, sinister powers and diabolical potency of female

sexuality (Federici 28). As with the ‘witches,’ Rogue’s sexuality and power are understood as forces to be exorcised.

Rogue’s powers render her an empty vessel, a container for the thoughts and memories and powers of someone else. Counterintuitively, her powers as a mutant are such that she has no powers of her own; she can only be a host for the abilities of others. Rogue struggles against this constantly, as her own subjectivity and inner life burst through to subvert this reading of her body as a passive host for others. In this sense, Rogue’s powers can be read as radical and her actions as a transgressive subversion of far-reaching understandings and treatments of the passive female body.

Touch, Sexuality, and the Erotic

Audre Lorde describes the erotic as “a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling” (Lorde 530). The erotic, as Audre Lorde convincingly argues, can be a source of power for women. Hence, the centrality of the suppression or stigmatisation of female erotic expression to structures of oppression. The erotic and its relationship to sensuality and touch, but also to power have contributed significantly to Rogue’s story, albeit less so than the explicitly sexual. The reduction of Rogue’s sexuality to off-panel penis-in-vagina (PIV) intercourse, which is framed from a masculine view of the female body and female desire, is pornographic, rather than erotic. Lorde specifies that the pornographic is “a direct denial of the power of the erotic... represent(ing) the suppression of true feeling” (Lorde 88). By reading Rogue’s character through an analytical lens informed by Lorde, however, Meg John Barker and others propose that Rogue problematizes and challenges a straight (-forward) presentation of female sexuality and the male gaze.

In *Psychology of Sex*, Meg-John Barker considers fantasies and taboos in the context of sex as proposed by Jack Morin, a non-fiction author on the erotic: “Excitement = Attraction + Obstacles. In other words, we tend to find it arousing when we’re attracted to something and there’s some difficulty to be overcome in order to get it” (Barker 107). By this equation, Rogue is inherently a sexually arousing character. Sex and sexuality are never far from the surface when discussing Rogue as a character. Since her first appearance -- kissing Captain America until he is rendered unconscious -- Rogue engages in virile, potent displays of sexual and physical power. Readers quickly understand that only Rogue can initiate sexual contact and only she can walk away from the encounter.

As discussed in the previous section, the construction of the hysteric woman arises, in great part, from a fear of the unleashed power of female sexuality. What could be a more potent image of such power rooted in sexuality than a female character that not only destroys another’s body through sexual contact, but absorbs their memories and abilities too? With this in mind, Rogue is a terrifying female character that, by extension, needs to be properly regulated. However, the presentation of her character as a sympathetic ‘good guy’ demands a more nuanced analysis.

An early-adolescent kiss is the first manifestation of Rogue’s power. As described by writer Ann Nocenti, Rogue’s first kiss is not innocent: “For her, a kiss is not a gentle thing. A kiss rips all memories from the lips it touches. In a split second, all (his) flaws and desires, all his hopes and lies -- are hers” (Nocenti, “Elegy” 10). Rogue’s first sexual exploration leaves her partner comatose. In another Nocenti issue, Rogue, dressed in a low-cut black mini-dress, deliberately uses her powers and kisses two security guards to disarm them while on a mission. Gripping one of their faces seductively between her hands, she asks, “Do you like me?” before launching an attack using her powers. She justifies her actions, “Gotta get my kicks somehow” (Nocenti, “The Mission” 15). Nonetheless, the male superhero deems her

‘hysterical,’ acting as if she were losing her mind. The clear implication is that the barriers put in place deterring Rogue to physically explore her body and sexuality are causing her to act out in sexually provocative dress and behavior.

While Rogue’s powers certainly cut her off from (easy) physical intimacy, it is problematic to assume that Rogue is incapable of having satisfying sexual experiences because of her powers or to assume that her powers are a cause or a manifestation of sexual dysfunction, and that her default, out-of-the-bag first option for sexual activity must (or should) be male-female, PIV intercourse. Notwithstanding, stories centred on romantic and sexual relationships tend to reduce Rogue’s powers to primarily serving as a barrier to heterosexual sexual activity culminating in PIV intercourse. Rogue has too often been cast as a passive female character, incapable of sexual pleasure without another (male) character present and incapable of desiring anything from physical contact or haptic experience beyond heterosexual ‘foreplay’ and PIV sex. Such representations confuse physical intimacy, sexual experience, and sexual satisfaction in their depictions of Rogue as being incapable of emotional intimacy, sexual satisfaction, or the erotic as defined by Lorde.

Barker proposes the notion of ‘proper’ sex to describe such a reductive sexual experience, highlighting that in popular culture, women are ‘nailed,’ ‘hammered,’ and ‘laid,’ and men ‘screw.’ In other words, a woman’s passive vagina is penetrated by an active penis. This conception of adult, genital sex (as opposed to ‘immature’ or ‘unhealthy’ sex) is not unique to the comics industry. It was popularised by Freud’s five sequential stages of psychosexual development, from the oral, to the anal, to the phallic, to the latent, and ending at the genital (Honig 73). The American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM-5) still primarily categorises sexual dysfunctions in relation to a default desire for PIV sex resulting in orgasm. Barker surveyed multiple examples across several mediums, that provide sex advice, such as, newspaper problem pages, sex related TV documentaries,

magazine articles, sex advice books, and websites, and found that “what sex advice generally means by sex is penis-in-vagina (PIV) intercourse with the goal of orgasm” (Barker 42).

Solo-sexual activity was categorised as ‘foreplay,’ a distinction that places it in a separate and less significant category than sex, with PIV sex being the ultimate goal. Barker traces this conception of sex to 19th-century Freudian definitions of sexuality that present “...PIV sex as the proper, mature form of sexual activity...” (Barker 45). Such a conception ignores the plethora of current research and theory, including that by Lori Brotto, Gina Ogden, Jack Morin, and Barker, that paints a more nuanced, intersectional, and individualised picture of what sexual desire, pleasure, and satisfaction can mean, especially for women.

Rosalind Gill, in her survey of research examining female sexual agency, paraphrases the findings of Janet Holland’s *The Male in the Head: Young People, Heterosexuality and Power*, to argue that “heterosexuality is constructed from within masculinity and that young women have ‘a male in the head’ that prevents them from fully experiencing and enjoying their sexual experiences on their own terms” (Gill 38). For female characters such as Rogue, written and drawn almost exclusively by men, it is difficult to argue that female sexual identity can be represented without being framed by a heteronormative, masculine point of view. With few exceptions, this has been the case for Rogue and her unique, independent, female sexual identity that is largely unformed.

Writer Brian Wood and artist David Choe proposed a series featuring alternate representations of Rogue’s relationship with sex, sexuality, and her body. In an early 2001 interview, Choe announced that he and Wood were working on a mature-rated, alternate universe X-men title for Marvel featuring an alternate-universe Rogue as a main character (Talbot). The following day, Wood announced that the issue had been cancelled (“WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN: NYX”), and Choe alleged (among other things) that then Editor in Chief of Marvel Comics, Joe Quesada, and Marvel had backed out of the project because of

the ‘edgier’ content in their proposal. According to Choe’s publicly released email to Quesada, the rejected content focused on Rogue becoming a vegetarian after eating/touching a steak,⁴ stalking and spying on people having sex, and owning a suitcase containing a “huge dildo collection.”

The idea of Rogue masturbating and using sex toys for sexual pleasure or as an alternative to penetrative heterosexual sex has never been suggested explicitly or otherwise in the comic books. Choe’s email to Quesada explicitly sets out that this aspect of his and Wood’s book -- Rogue’s exploration of her body and sexuality in the absence of human contact -- was offensive to Quesada and Marvel in a way that, say, a contemporary depiction of Nick Fury strangling a man with his own intestines, as in Garth Ennis’ “Be Careful What You Wish For,” was not. As the book never saw print and only a preliminary script and conceptual art work were released, it is not possible to determine if Rogue’s use of sex toys was intended to show an active engagement with and responsibility for her own sexual fulfilment or whether it was meant to represent the opposite, the use of “paraphilias” (Barker 41) in the absence of PIV sex.

In the Rogue ongoing series of 2004-2005, Tony Bedard explored Rogue’s need for emotional and tactile connection. It was revealed that Rogue, while still in the care of Mystique and ostensibly a villain, had a female best friend named Blindspot, who was immune to Rogue’s powers and thus able to touch her without adverse effect. They formed a close friendship and are even presented holding hands (skin to skin) and smiling affectionately on a flight next to one another. Unlike the pornographic PIV scenes, this depiction of sexual intimacy recalls Lorde’s concept of the erotic as “The sharing of joy,

⁴ Rogue’s abilities appear to work on humans and aliens alike, but the touching of animals, alive or dead, has never fully been explored.

whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, [that] forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them” (Lorde 89).

In the present, the now adult Blindspot brings Rogue closer to her, partially for self-preservation, but also because she misses and loves Rogue, whom she describes as “the only one like *me*” (Bedard, “Forget-Me-Not: Conclusion” 14). Because of her power to remove the memories of those around her and the criminal lifestyle it enables, Blindspot is as emotionally isolated as Rogue is physically. Like Rogue, her mutant powers work without the consent of the other character whose memories she steals. In Rogue, she sees the only other person who can understand her predicament. Blindspot’s claiming possession of Rogue’s full body costume from her Brotherhood period, which she sleeps beside at night, demonstrates the depth and physicality of the bond they shared. The arc ends with the two female characters striking a bargain: Blindspot returns the memories of their friendship that she had stolen from Rogue, and Rogue gives Blindspot her current X-men uniform. The final issue ends on a deeply sensual moment, with Blindspot asleep in bed, cradling Rogue’s clothing.

Writers Steve Seagle and Joe Kelly, who wrote *The Uncanny X-men* and *X-men* for approximately 18 months in the late 1990s,⁵ revisit the sensual, erotic aspect of Rogue’s existence. They also focus on the relationship of Rogue’s powers to her body and sensual experience. Immediately before their first issue, Rogue experienced her first sexual interaction with another person, her teammate and on/off love interest Gambit, during one night when they were imprisoned together and their mutant powers were negated. Rather than furthering the relationship, Rogue abandons Gambit to (seemingly) die in the Antarctic under

⁵ Seagle and Kelly joined the X-titles after the departure of Scott Lodbell, and during a period of creative churn under the then Editor-in-Chief Bob Harras.

the influence of his acquired, self-hating psyche. Previously, in the same issue of *The Uncanny X-Men*, she was forced to use her powers on Gambit, absorbing and then reliving his traumatic memories (Seagle “Trial and Errors” 28). The functions of her mutant body once again took her autonomy of mind and action from her, leaving her traumatised, distressed, and (as readers discover in Kelly Thompson’s 2017 run on *Rogue & Gambit*) associating sex and sexuality with vulnerability, pain, and trauma (Thompson, “Ring of Fire”).

In response to the trauma of “Trial and Errors,” Rogue quasi-regresses to the child-like, impulsive persona she was when she was first introduced in 1981. She spends days in bed, curled beside a teddy bear in the fetal position, and alternately hiding from and rejecting interventions from teammates (Kelly, “Identity Crisis” 1). The narrative voice highlights Rogue’s confusion and desperation over the inability to control her powers, and her experience with Gambit and subsequent despair is framed around sensual, rather than sexual, physical experience. Considered through the lens of Lorde’s definition of erotic power, her sense of frustrated loneliness and despair could be seen as Rogue recognising her potential capacity for feeling and joy and, in doing so, becoming “less willing to accept powerlessness” (Lorde 90).

Rogue’s desire for sexual experience is reflected in her dream, which echos Freudian theories of repression as described by James Drever and Harvey Wallerstein (247). Rogue’s dream is a violent, almost erotic fantasy in which she physically assaults her teammate Wolverine in a moonlit room, touching flesh-to-flesh to absorb him against his will. She tells him, and the reader, that she needs to touch. In it, Rogue describes the feeling of absorbing life, thoughts, and power with almost gluttonous delight, and relishes in his healing ability and claws.⁶ This is contrasted with the third-person narrative voice, describing the “gentle...

⁶ She subsequently tells a teammate that she “relished” draining Logan.

compassionate... supportive...sympathetic” power of human touch: “the one thing that can bring two people *together*.” Any sense of delight disappears at the end of the dream, as Rogue begs Wolverine to kill her because she can’t control herself and wants to either protect other people or save herself from the psychological torment of desiring an experience that is not possible for her to have without harming others. It is strongly suggested that Rogue’s experience of skin-to-skin contact with Gambit has made her lustful for any and all kinds of touch, regardless of the consequences.

However, there is an almost vampiric dichotomy between the pleasure of touching and being touched and the anguish over the consequences of that pleasure for others. In the dream, and in subsequent issues, Rogue dons the green and white hooded uniform from her first appearance and attack on Carol Danvers. This significant detail serves as a visual metaphor, communicating the extent of her regression that reaches the point of her pivotal first trauma. Like that formative, traumatic experience, the hesitancy and uncertainty of her interior voice contrasts with the brash exhibitionist excitement of her outward presentation.

One night of sensual experience made Rogue realize how other, unafflicted characters experienced sexuality and how limited and small her own ability to partake in sexual expression is. This is supported by her behavior across the following issues that becomes erratic and impulsive. She wears revealing sexy clothes and uncovers her hands, thus turning her body into an immediate physical danger to those around her. She tries to find reasons why she should touch, and therefore absorb, teammates -- seemingly to help them -- only to be rebuffed as a lunatic. In one instance, she discovers Wolverine, whom she dreamt of, unconscious after an attack by the similarly powered villain Sauron. Unable to resist the opportunity to engage in skin-to-skin contact, she adjusts his clothing so that she can place her hands on his bare chest. She then encounters a teammate who had previously rejected her offer to touch him and explore his memories. Now that he is unconscious and not breathing,

she attempts CPR on him, experiencing the flesh-to-flesh contact that he previously refused her. This traumatic day, which finds Rogue caught between desire and remorse, leads her to flee the X-mansion and seek out a Manhattan doctor promising a cure for her mutant powers.

This story arc, alongside that of Tony Bedard's, is one of the few instances where Rogue's relationship to sensuality, touch, and the erotic is explored beyond PIV intercourse. From *Uncanny X-men* 349 to *Uncanny X-men* 359, Rogue comes to a reluctant acceptance of her powers, accepting the impossibility of an instant cure and her limited access to sensual, tactile contact with others. There were two versions of the concluding issue of Rogue's arc. In the first script, provided by writer Joe Kelly on the Rogue fan site Down Home Charm, ("Joe Kelly's Original Story For #359"), Rogue successfully uses a device to control her powers before discovering that its continual use degrades the user into a blob of semi-conscious flesh. In the published comic, Rogue does not get the chance to use power-nullifying technology and, by extension, experience a 'normal' sexual life before she discovers it is a scam. This first version of the script for issue 359 begins with Rogue leaping from a stage to crowd surf at a concert: "... smiling wildly as she leaps from the stage, sporting a sports bra, with her tunic costume tied/arranged around her waist. It's not the leap itself that's so exciting, but rather the fact that she's caught by eight or ten pairs of hands, which cradle her body, skin touching skin." In it, Rogue also plays "a rough game of pick-up basketball" with shirtless strangers; nose kisses a baby; presses money into a homeless man's hand; and has a massage at a Spa. Per the script, "we see Rogue doing things around town that she never dreamed she could do..." Rogue's revelatory delight to these small intimate moments from everyday experience serves as a potent reminder of how restricted, sterilised, and cold life is for those like her, who cannot experience them.

Tactile experiences, some have argued, are an important form of social communication, "similar to that demonstrated previously in vision and audition" (Gallace

and Spence). The pleasurable aspect of touch is “at the heart of the social domain, allowing positive hedonic experience ranging from the reassurance of a pat on the back to the rills of a sensual caress” (Morrison et al. 305). Joe Kelly’s first script for *The uncanny X-men* 359 is one of the few issues that explores the social, interpersonal, hedonic aspect of touch as a crucial and aching absent part of Rogue’s existence, and one that she craves. This craving is also apparent in the bargain she strikes with Blindspot (Bedard, “Forget-Me-Not: Conclusion” 23). Rogue desires the memories of the intimate and sensual connection that they shared, just as Blindspot desires Rogue’s uniform through which she can relish Rogue physically.

In the issue of *The Uncanny X-men* 359 that was published, Rogue’s reason for pursuing a cure was framed around a desire for heterosexual sensual and sexual contact. It presents a more reductive, heteronormative, and masculine vision of what skin-to-skin contact means to a young woman than that which was explored in her relationship with Blindspot. This heteronormativity forms most of the canon for Rogue, especially when she reflect on her mutant powers and what a lack of touch means for her. The Forget-Me-Not arc of Rogue presents one of the very few instances where Rogue longs for human touch so that she can establish a meaningful connection with others, and partake in a rich range of experiences, sexual and otherwise, as if she were ‘normal’ (in her perception of ‘normal’). It thus also serves to underscore how Rogue’s mutant powers exclude her from many day-to-day experiences, including sensual, intimate, and joyful tactile interaction with others.

Models of Care and Treatment

Rogue has not so much gained, but rather has been granted control of her powers on several occasions by external characters representative of a paternalistic patriarchal model of Freudian diagnosis and treatment. Until Kelly Thompson’s 2018-2019 *Mr & Mrs X*, featuring Rogue and her now husband Gambit, the granting of control did not feature Rogue gaining a

conscious, articulated knowledge of her body, her mind, and the relationship between the two that prohibited control over her powers. Since her introduction, it has been heavily implied that Rogue's inability to control her powers was related to a psychological issue -- one of Freudian internal constraints in the realm of the unconscious -- rather than to physical or biological issues, as is the case for her teammate Cyclops.

In 2009, writer Mike Carey brought Rogue back to the X-fold after a period of absence. In her first arc, with the assistance of Professor Xavier and his now embodied training-machine Danger, Rogue was given control of her absorption powers. Unlike the Manhattan Doctor whose help she sought during Joe Kelly's X-men run, Rogue did not seek this treatment. Instead, Danger discusses with Professor Xavier what they have discovered while exploring Rogue's psyche and they formulate a diagnosis explaining Rogue's inability to control her mutant powers and devise a potential remedy for it. Together, they explain to Rogue that the first use of her powers left a boy comatose and her with a mind full of memories, thoughts, and feeling that did not belong to her. Ultimately, that experience partitioned her mind: "The boy's thoughts on one side of the wall. Yours on the other" (Carey, "Salvage: Part 5" 12). This diagnosis is similar to medical descriptions of dissociation, a term coined by the psychiatrist Pierre Janet, to account for the "... abnormal splitting of mental processes resulting in compartmentalization of the personality into segments inaccessible to one another" (North 498). Rogue's mind is partitioned with each absorption, resulting in the freezing of her powers at their first stage of development.

In a kind of visual psychotherapy session, Xavier travels into her mind to identify these partitions and tear them down, reintegrating her mind into a cohesive whole and thus removing barriers to self-communication. In the end, his process is more akin to that of a surgeon: Rogue's mind is presented as something that can be repaired or stitched back together with external and invasive intervention meant to repair the mind, but ultimately

leaves it in an undeveloped, adolescent state. Following the intervention, Rogue is confused and angry; she does not understand what she has to do or feel to know that she can consciously control her mutant powers. Unsurprisingly, Xavier is unable to provide any further guidance, and advises Rogue that she will have to experiment with and test her powers as if she were a teenager again.

Despite his encouragement, the promise of Rogue engaging in a process towards self-realisation and psychic unity and experiencing a healthy relationship with her material, sensual, and sexual body goes unfulfilled. Over the remaining 26 issues of Carey's run, no further explanation or exploration of the extent of her control and how she understands or applies it is offered. Throughout this run and after this seminal change in her mind-body relationship, readers are not given insight into Rogue's thoughts, feelings, or inner processes. Having lived her entire adult life physically isolated from the touch of others and now able to experience simple things, such as the petting of a dog, wearing a t-shirt in public, or getting a haircut in a salon (even if she does not understand why), Rogue does not say, let alone think, anything of substance that is not contradicted later in the same run. She is effectively mute and passive, leaving other characters to interpret her responses to these experiences or explain her decisions.

Given Rogue's passive response, Xavier's actions in giving her control can be approached as an example of a paternalistic, male-centered model of care, much like his returning the memories of Carol Danvers after Rogue's attack in AA10.⁷ In this life-altering instance, Rogue presents as a body to be exorcised, and not as an active agent of change. In this sense, the relationship between the all-knowing Xavier and a compliant Rogue is akin to

⁷ Xavier's omega-level mutant powers have been used as a plot device or as plot salvage since the earliest iterations of the character.

the preferred woman patient of the Victoria physician, who trusts their doctor and does not ask questions about his decisions (Showalter 298). She is also akin to the ideal 19th-century hysteric patient, abdicating responsibility over her body to a patriarchal figure.

In this instance, Rogue does not earn control over her self and body; nor does she secure an active part in gaining or maintaining it. Instead, a paternal figure tells her why she is not able to control her powers and then supposedly solves the problem. The only demonstration of the control she is promised is an implied night of PIV sex with an older, semi-paternal, figure and six panels of pillow-talk.⁸ This ‘morning-after’ scene compresses a lot of gender-normative, phallocentric content into an otherwise small storytelling space. In it, Rogue lies on her side with her head on Magneto’s shoulder, submissively clinging to his muscular, virile male body as he lays on his back and asks if his sexual performance satisfied her.

By contrast, in 2018’s ongoing title, *Mr & Mrs X*, Kelly Thompson presents an active, self-actualising Rogue, who realises that she was responsible for creating psychological barriers of fear that prevented engagement with and control of her powers. Multiple traumatic events associated with her powers lead to her creation of these psychological barriers, including an incident long overlooked in the X-men canon, when prison guards on the island of Genosha rendered her powerless and physically abused her (although this explicitly did not extend to rape or sexual assault) (Thompson, “Gambit & Rogue Forever” 17). After this

⁸ The cover of this issue -- *X-men Legacy* 249 -- is notable for its spectacular lapse of taste, even before examination of its gender normative imagery. With eyes closed and posture soft, Rogue drapes herself over the back of a furious, fist-curling, teeth-grinding Magneto outside the gates of Auschwitz. The passive female adoringly folded around a dominant, physically powerful male imagery is repeated throughout the covers of this run of X-men Legacy.

formative teenage incident, Rogue acknowledges that even if her body excluded her from the human sensual experiences, emotions, and sensations she desired to have, it also kept her safe from those who would hurt her.

Thompson's diagnosis of and treatment for Rogue mirrors the Freudian definition of hysteria: "an idea or memory that makes one ill" (Zakin). Indeed, Rogue's powers are a tactile, physical representation of what manifests in other characters, such as Wolverine, as aggression or other social behaviors that keep characters within their zone of known experience, however unpleasant, and protect them against the fear of change and the unknown. Cognitive behavioral therapy for anxiety disorders includes the building of resilience through gradual exposure to experiences, thoughts, or emotions that cause fear, but the avoidance of which keep a person in a self-perpetuating and ever smaller loop of restricted experience. Adhering to such theories, it is only through explicitly addressing that memory that causes her fear that can Rogue become well. In finally taking sole responsibility for her own psychological and physiological care, Rogue has overcome what Showalter, in another context, describes as "passive acquiescence to the strictures of a patriarchal society" (Showalter 299). Rogue breaks the archetype of patriarchal care to insist on self-care. Even if a healed, unified psyche remains impossible -- Rogue is a divided subject with a fragmentary mosaic of experiences and emotions not her own -- purposeful self-care, self-knowledge, and self-acceptance prevail.

In this contribution, I have argued that Rogue inherently challenges binaries and archetypes of sexuality. The nature of her powers are irrational, sexual, and sensual, leaving behind damaged, angry shells of those like Carol Danvers who retain only logic and knowledge stripped of feeling. I have traced how Rogue's body, physiology, and psyche provide a power that can defeat almost any opponent, and outlined how the use of that power can also cause that same body, physiology, and psyche to become unreliable. Rogue, as I

suggest, can thus be seen as a metaphor for the ungovernable, suspect threat of female sexuality that has permeated the literature at least since the 18th century. Depending on the writer, her sexuality has in turn been depicted as something she can govern or, by contrast, as something that needs to be identified, labelled, and ‘cured’ by the comic book equivalent of a psychotherapist. However, as elegantly illustrated in the work of Kelly Thompson, Rogue’s character also embodies Lorde’s concept of the erotic as a “capacity for feeling” (Lorde 89) that acts as a source of power and self-empowerment. Ultimately, Rogue embodies a potential for self-satisfaction and knowledge that rejects patriarchal models of power and care. Is it fitting, then, that Rogue, who is capable of turning even the most powerful men into quivering wrecks with her physical strength and absorption of emotion and affect, should be labelled hysterical by others?

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